



Planting Trees to Improve Fish Habitat



Eleven members of the non-profit organization, Bark, joined employees from the Mt. Hood National Forest in planting upwards of 600 cedar and fir seedlings to jumpstart the forest's reclamation of an old decommissioned spur road. The Forest Service decommissioned this road two years ago by digging up the gravel roadbed and removing three major culverts and over a dozen smaller culverts, which restored stream access for threatened salmon and trout species. The entire road prism, a

10 mile stretch of road, was removed and now permits the absorption of rain water. Due to restored natural slope grading stream flows have also returned to normal. Projects like these remedy issues that pose erosion hazards to natural resources. That's why removing culverts, breaking up the roadbed, and planting seedlings is important.

"This was a great opportunity for Bark to partner with the Forest Service to do what we both agree is valuable, high priority work to restore watershed health," said Russ Plaeger, Program Director for Bark. "Bark volunteers are excited about the possibility of doing more tree planting on decommissioned roads next year. In this and other activities Bark volunteers are motivated by the opportunity to make a positive difference for our national forest."

Over time, road decommissioning greatly reduces erosion which can negatively impact streams, and the newly planted streamside trees provide shade that cools water temperatures for the salmon that rely on clean, cold mountain streams to thrive. Once young conifers grow old, their downed wood falls into streams and creates pools and channels, a crucial feature for habitat diversity as well as providing food and shelter for fish species. “Road decommissioning is important to the Forest Service and we continue to decommission roads where needed,” said Bill Westbrook, Zigzag District Ranger. “Organizations have provided assistance in performing needed restoration and maintenance. I appreciate groups that help with these efforts, like Bark in this instance, and enjoyed my time spent elbow to elbow planting trees to continue the restoration work.”



Over the past 10 years, the Mt. Hood National Forest has worked with partners to decommission over 600 miles of road in accordance with our master road management plans. Road decommissioning benefits many resources—water quality and wildlife habitat are improved, and limited road maintenance funds can be focused on roads that produce public benefits such as access to trailheads and campgrounds. In addition, people from local communities are often employed as equipment operators or contractors during roadwork.



“Clean water is one of the highest values of our public lands,” said Plaeger. “The Forest Service staff on the Mt. Hood has done a good job of proactively closing and removing unneeded roads. That has resulted in family wage jobs for heavy equipment operators and the restoration of priority watersheds.”

The hard work of forest staff and volunteers enables the Forest to remain the beautiful and dynamic place we enjoy while also providing a well-maintained and a functional road system.